Education Discussion Paper

06/79: RECENT TRENDS IN B.C. SECONDARY SCHOOL COURSE ORGANIZATIONS

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DISCUSSION PAPER 06/79

RECENT TRENDS IN B.C. SECONDARY SCHOOL COURSE ORGANIZATIONS

prepared by

DAVID REES

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Information Services

The author taught for two years in B.C. public schools at the secondary level and is now working as a Systems/Research Administrator for B.C. Research under contract to Educational Data Services, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the semester system was introduced to B.C. in 1969/70 many schools have gone off the 10-month system in favour of some form of semester organization. The majority of secondary schools have opted for some combination of the two systems to meet local needs and concerns.

While the advantages of the semester system vs. the traditional 10-month organization is a common topic for discussion in school classrooms, staff meetings and parent-teacher meetings it is perhaps, more than anything else, the administrators who determine the organization of a school. As new information and reports are produced regarding the advantages and disadvantages of semester vs. 10-month systems, administrators must evaluate, in light of their own circumstances, the direction to take in course organization.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is not to judge the merits of any system - most administrators know the arguments all too well. It is, however, to provide the educational community with an analysis of the trends during the past ten years with respect to the organization of secondary schools.

Every September, schools enrolling secondary pupils complete the Organization of Secondary Schools form (Form K) on which the organizational structure, timetable structure, etc., are indicated.

The six categories of school organization are:

10-month	
Two-semester	Semestered
Three-semester	Semestered
Four-semester	Semestered
Partial 10-month/partial semester	Alternative
Other	Alternative

For the purposes of this analysis two-, three-, and four-semestered schools are combined as are the partial 10-month/partial semester and "other" schools. An analysis using six categories of course organization would not be meaningful

and would become overly complex. Since there are relatively few three- and four- semestered schools they are better placed, and more accurately analyzed, with the two-semestered schools. Similarly, the "other" category has only existed for the past two years and is combined with the partial 10-month/partial semestered schools to make an "alternative" organization category as compared to either the 10-month or semestered systems.

TABLE 1 NUMBER OF B.C. PUBLIC SCHOOLS ENROLLING SECONDARY PUPILS BY COURSE ORGANIZATION, 1969/70 - 1978/79

School Year	10-Month		Semestered		Alternative		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1969/70	DATA NOT AVAILABLE							
1970/71	248	84	49	16	0	-	297	100
1971/72	223	74	80	26	0	-	303	100
1972/73	182	61	90	30	26	9	298	100
1973/74	153	50	81	26	74	24	308	100
1974/75	146	46	93	29	80	25	319	100
1975/76	130	42	91	29	90	29	311	100
1976/77	123	38	82	25	119	37	324	100
1977/78	139	39	85	24	128	36	352	100
1978/79	145	39	63	17	160	43	368	100

Source: Form K 1970-1978

ANALYSIS

Table 1 shows the rapid decline between 1970 and 1978 in the number of 10-month schools despite an overall increase in the number of schools enrolling secondary students. Over the past three years the percentage of schools with 10-month course organizations has stabilized at approximately 39% of all school with secondary pupils. Obviously, the semester and alternative course organizations have appealed to more than 60% of the schools in 1978-79.

Is there a relationship between the course organization and school size? Table 2 shows that there is for the 1978/79 school year.

TABLE 2 PERCENTAGE OF B.C. PUBLIC SCHOOLS ENROLLING SECONDARY PUPILS BY SIZE OF ENROLMENT AND COURSE ORGANIZATION, 1978/79

Number of Pupils	10 Month	Semestered	Alternative
1000+	9.0%	20.6%	16.9%
500-999	28.3	60.3	52.5
250-499	26.9	9.5	20.6
100-249	17.9	4.8	6.9
0-99	17.9	4.8	3.1
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%
N =	145	63	160

Source: Form K 1978/79

Table 2 indicates that the majority of schools with 10-month organizations have fewer than 500 pupils (62.7%) while the semestered and alternative systems tend to be dominant in the larger schools (80.9% and 69.4% respectively). An important bias is present though. This is the type '2' (K-X), and '3' (K-XII) schools - those having both elementary and secondary student populations. These schools, it might be expected, would either be operating on the 10-month system or on an alternative course organization in order to facilitate the elementary pupils.

Hence, an unbiased analysis of semestered schools would require the inclusion of only those schools with secondary pupils (i.e., types 4, 5, and 6). Table 3 shows the trend for these school types.

The data in table 3 is also portrayed in graph 1. It is interesting to note that in 1975/76 all three course organizations were each present in approximately one-third of all secondary schools. In the past four years the percentage of 10-month schools has remained fairly constant, between 30% and 34%. The percentage of semestered schools though has dropped from

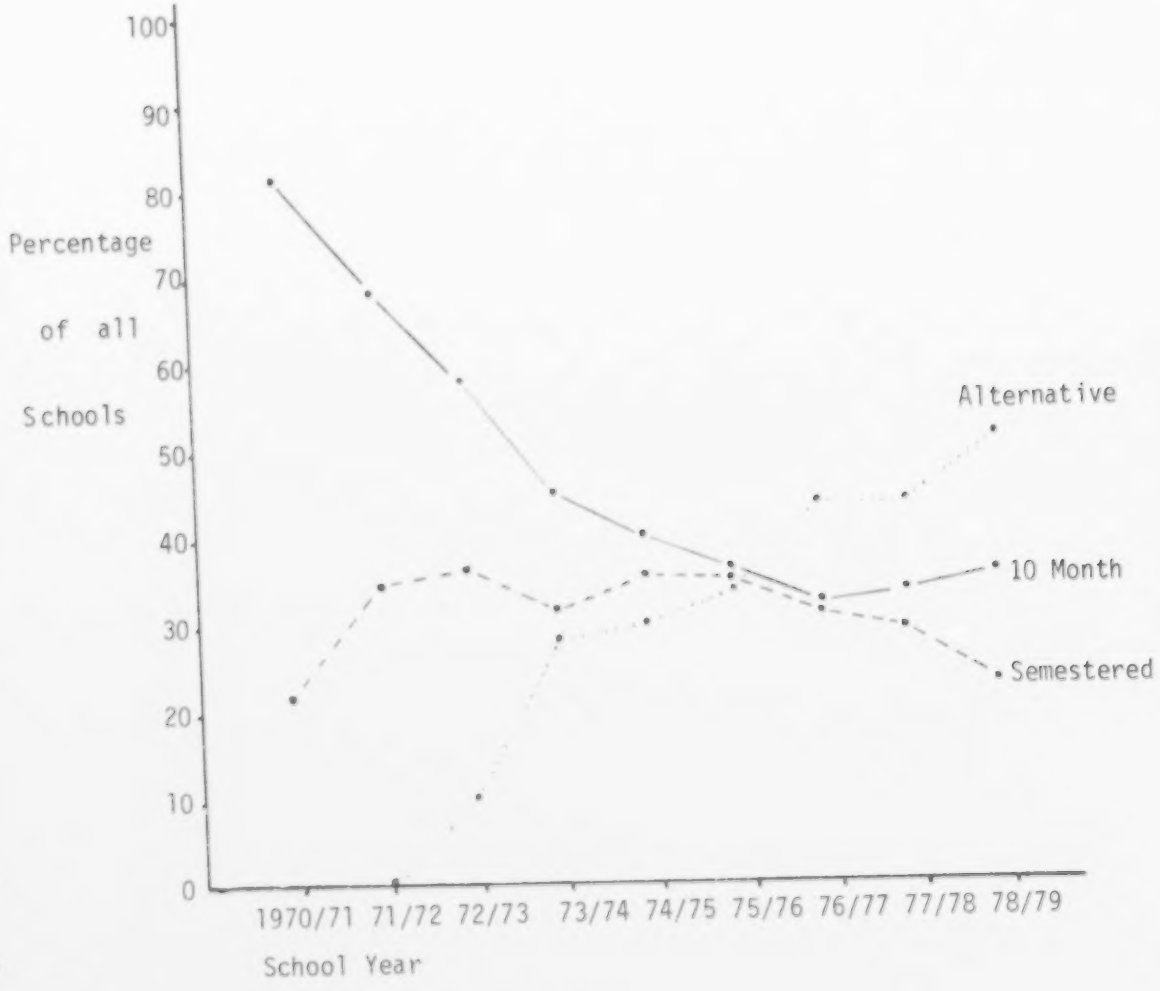
33% to 20%. The schools with alternative course organizations has risen dramatically from 9% in 1972/73 to 32% in 1975/76 to 48% in 1978/79.

TABLE 3 NUMBER OF B.C. PUBLIC SCHOOLS ENROLLING SECONDARY STUDENTS ONLY (I.E., JUNIOR SECONDARY, SECONDARY AND SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS) BY COURSE ORGANIZATION 1970/71 - 1978/79

YEAR	10 MONTH	%	SEMESTERED	%	ALTERNATIVE	%	TOTAL	%
1969/70	DATA NOT AVAILABLE							
1970/71	183	79	49	21	0	-	232	100
1971/72	162	67	80	33	0	-	242	100
1972/73	142	56	88	35	26	9	253	100
1973/74	111	43	78	30	71	27	260	100
1974/75	101	38	91	34	75	28	267	100
1975/76	88	34	86	33	83	32	257	100
1976/77	79	30	76	29	107	41	262	100
1977/78	89	32	77	27	117	41	282	100
1978/79	94	33	57	20	137	48	288	100

Source: Form K 1970/71 - 1978/79

GRAPH 1 PERCENTAGE OF B.C. PUBLIC JUNIOR SECONDARY, SECONDARY, AND SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS WITH "10-MONTH", "SEMESTERED" AND "ALTERNATIVE" COURSE ORGANIZATIONS, 1970/71 - 1978/79



Source: Form K 1970-1978

SUMMARY

Assuming continuity of the 10-month schools, this large increase in "alternative" course organizations may be the result of three factors. First, secondary schools may have opted for the 10-month system for grade 8-10 students and the semester system for senior students. Second, there may be a movement toward the 10-month system for core subjects (e.g., English, Math, PHE) and the semester system for elective courses. Finally, the substantial increase in alternative systems may be a transitional phase for schools returning to the 10-month course organization but retaining semesters for those students already in that system.

Among secondary schools only, the number of schools on the 10 month system has shown a numerical increase over the past three years, but in percentage terms it has remained relatively stable, showing only a very slight increase. The semester system, after an initial three or four year period of popularity has shown a small, albeit a steady decline. Finally, it appears that more and more schools are selecting course organizations which either suit their particular needs by combining aspects of the 10-month and semester system, or, are designing their own.